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When Bird and Fish Fall in Love

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
University of New Orleans
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts
in
Film, Theatre and Communication Arts
Creative Writing

by

Matthew C. Mackey

B.A. Kent State University

December 2012

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Introduction

Translation, the familiar concept of rendering a text from one language to another, has an interesting history. The word in English dates back to the mid-14th century, when it harbored a unique meaning as the “removal of a saint's body or relics to a new place” (Harper). The act of translation is, in a sense, the act of preservation and worship. The saint's body is subject to decay and thievery unless *translated* to a place of preservation. In so doing, the body is extolled, or lifted up, lifted out of, raised above. Translation is a means of uncovering a body of significant meaning. The act of translation, as proposed here, is a method of poetics that examines the dynamics of relationships and offers a means to express the significance of a given relationship.

As a mode of investigating relationships, translation focuses on the space between entities and seeks to diminish distance. By conveying the significant terms of a given relationship, translation defines the link between two positions. It operates as a potential poetic model for 1) narrowing the gaps in referentiality and/or 2) expressing the terms of given relationships. Since language at its basic level is a removal from the actual, the separation of references (words) and referents (actual things) translation comes to negotiate the distance between reference and referent in an attempt to express the relationship. It asks the question, for example, what exists between “tree” and tree? By extension, translation can also be used as a means of understanding positions in the actual sphere of reality by examining the language that constructs relationships and posing a means of expressing the significance of the relationship. Here it asks the question, what exists between tree and self? Translation is ultimately the search for a term that demonstrates the significance of a relationship.

The first act of translation is examining the condition of language in which relationships are expressed. By condition here I mean the current situation of language and the way in which it

is or has been trained. Currently, language, as a removal from actuality, operates as a system of references that only points toward reality. Because language is a system, the obvious danger of its use lies in its ability to become routine. This happens, by and large, when language is allowed to supplant the actual. As Baudrillard warns in *The Precession of Simulacra*, the fear is that signs may take priority over the things signified (Leicht 1730). The opposite of translation is stasis, copy, or repetition, the wholesale reliance on the condition of language to express what it already fails to. Language that remains systemic is more copy of a copy, and poets relying on repetition of the system rather than precision risk losing the actual and forfeit real meaning.

Furthermore, the function of language as a system can be considered, as Michel Foucault suggests, a power of separation. Language functioning as a means of separation can only express relationship in terms of a removal from actuality and by defining the components or the division of relationship, not the relationship itself. Foucault believes that power while it can operate physically on bodies, discursively, it carves up the world (Leitch 1619). Language creates distance between two entities by dividing their relationship and putting everything into its place (Leitch 1619). For example, “leaf” is separated by language from “branch” and “branch” from “tree,” so on and so on until eventually the system separates “leaf” from everything. Translation is the reversal of this process. It works to bring together that which is separated by language. For poets, translation offers an opportunity to get closer to the significance of relationships by reversing any degree of separation, providing potential for new areas of meaning.

The conditioning of language, in part through social, historical, or institutional acclimatizing and in part through personal routine and experience, must be addressed since translation is an attempt to understand first the meaning of the actual. Translation is not only the awareness of the deficiency in language to capture the actual, but it is an awareness of how

language is trained by external forces and internal patterns that construct our understanding of relationships. For instance, my usage and understanding of “tree” in its many contexts has been trained by both external forces and personal experiences. Training or conditioning becomes practice, practice becomes custom, and custom becomes habit, thus perpetuating the system.

It is not that deconditioning language reduces entities to a thing beyond language, but rather it allows one to understand how entities are fitted into the condition of language, and this is important to perceiving the relationship of entities. For example, “tree” is the word that exists between myself and the tall woody plant I wish to place in a poem. We can thank St. Augustine among others for saying in Book II of *On Christian Doctrine*, “A sign is a thing which causes us to think of something beyond the impression the thing itself makes upon the senses” (Augustine 188). In fact, when I express the word “tree,” it is already conditioned by external forces and my internal experience of the “tree”/tree dichotomy. Understanding how “tree” is conditioned offers clues to its relationship to tree and to self. Translation offers poets an awareness of the danger of stasis and repetition. It also offers a way of perceiving gaps in meaning by examining the way in which we structure position and relationship.

The second act of translation works to understand the moment of conflation between two entities by providing the significant term of the relationship. Once the positions of occupation within the relationship are understood within the conditioning of language, the two positions can begin to be understood in terms of their relationship. For example, tree comes to be understood in its particular relationship with me as I understand the deficiency of “tree” and my experience with the actual tree. I must first decondition the external forces that suppress tree into “tree” as well as my particular usage of the word “tree” and my personal history of tree. I begin to understand through the experience of language and the experience of the actual what the

significance of the relationship is between it and I. The term is that which comes to stand for the relationship itself. This term is not necessarily universal, but is most certainly specific, and it must be discovered as the unique term for unique relationships. This significant term is the body of meaning that expresses the relationship, the term that stands as the conflation of positions in a relationship, and it is at this point where we find the saint's body.

In conflation, something new is created that outside of the conditioning of language, for it is neither a stasis nor a separation. All relationships have a point of conflation, physically in some cases and abstract in others. Perhaps a simple aphorism from Wallace Stevens' *Adagia* may shed some light. He says, in the second section of the long work, "French and English constitute a single language" (Stevens 975). The question of conflation, in this instance, as I see it, is twofold. Is there a language superseding both French and English from which they both derive or are they two halves of a single language? Translation is a means of either tracing the separated parts to a single source language, a possible resting place of the saint's body, or discovering a hybridized language, which may also be the place where the saint's body exists.

Translation is indeed a search for a sign that exists at this moment. As a method of discerning relationships it expresses the reversal of separation by expressing the term between "leaf" and "branch," "branch" and "tree," so on. Eventually, it is possible to express even the sign of the relationship, when "leaf" and "self" are neither one nor the other, but something new. This new sign is in fact the saint's body. Translation is through which poetics may have a deeper understanding of what relationship means, and more importantly, through which it may more accurately express those relationships.

The last movement is the attempt to concentrate that which rests at this deconditioned moment of conflation, where new meaning may possibly be found. Translation is a poetic

execution of this moment, the exhumation and relocation of the saint's body. The process demands a new form and functionality that brings into being that which exists, but is not or has not been articulated. Robert Creeley famously says that "Form is never more than the extension of content" (qtd. in Olson 1054). If this is true, then translation forces poets to find new forms that extend or expose the significance of the relationship. If content presumably comes before form then form must be considered in terms of the content. I might lengthen the assertion that poets practicing translation should be aware of the function of their forms, or how the form functions as a sign itself. The saint's body in translation is the object of reverence and, therefore, must be raised up, but since the saint's body is the content, the poet's responsibility is displaying the saint's body into an exact form so that the form and content may function together as in a sign, being of two parts the signifier (that which conveys meaning) and the signified (that which is meant). It is more accurately, the creation of a new sign that comes to mean the relationship.

This collection of poetry serves to expand some of these ideas. It is an attempt to narrate the process of translation by focusing on the characters bird and fish as two positions in a relationship. I have attempted to decondition the system of language and the deficiencies therein by deconditioning the idea of "bird" and "fish." Language, here in the loose representation of tree, comes to separate the two. Their involvement with the tree respectively constitutes their position in the relationship. They are held, one in the branches, one in the watery roots, and the goal of translation is to find out what happens to each in the condition of their separation. The idea is to find a place where bird and fish come together and ultimately reveal the terms of their relationship. Major themes in this work play with the idea of coming together or the experience of positions in various relationships. It isn't until the end of the collection that bird and fish truly conflate (as do I and the reader) in the very thing of a poem. The attempt is to demonstrate the

power of poetry to release the actual from its fixed position in the conditioning of language and to become the place where entities become one.

The poem “Bird Out of the Machine,” examines the firm and definitive use of language to name a thing in such a way that separates it from other things, such as naming the bird apart from other birds by constraining its position with a Latin ruler or alphabet as well as an attempt to separate the bird from speaker. The problem with such rule is that it poses no answers to explain the mystery of relationship between the bird and the speaker. The speaker states,

but I have no idea how she spins in the air
like a frightened minnow,
or sings as red and purple ribbon falling,

nor how she made a nest of my tongue.
In her absence, she left a tiny, blue egg,
Which I now keep on the mantle.

The speaker’s interest is the experience of the relationship in actuality beyond the control of language. The speaker unites the bird through simile with a frightened minnow and ribbon falling as he seeks to decondition the bird’s place in language instead of subscribing to the static and fixed language of science. Ultimately, however, the bird exists without being forced into a designation (a de-signing). What the speaker keeps on his mantle, the egg, is a token of the mysterious relationship between he and the bird.

In the poem, “13 Leaves,” I pull on recurring motifs to hopefully point towards what I believe possibly exists at the moment of conflation between the specific two positions. This is one example of translation. Whenever the position is changed or a new component is introduced

such as my relationship to each, the relationship between the two positions must be retranslated. I've also used the alphabet as a schematic device to illustrate the association of reference and referent. Albatross is a reference to the letter A and Zebrafish the letter Z, so that there is a hint of the gaps in language itself.

Here the moment of conflation is what I aim to express. The fourth line, as an example reads, "4. Dove {sinking} White Cloud Mountain Minnow." What is not expressed in this poem is the deconditioning work. Both Dove and Minnow as they exist in relationship to each other and to myself, must be realized in their current state of conditioning. All the definitions of Dove, the symbolism, the history, and my experiences of the word and the actual had to be carefully examined so that I could discover the meaning of its relationship with me before I could understand its relationship with White Cloud Mountain Minnow. I worked to understand the same of the minnow before I could offer a significant term that conflated the two.

Lastly, I worked to understand how to concentrate the moment of conflation into a unique form. The poem, "The Sound and the Movement" is a poem that expresses two positions working towards conflation, finally reaching their unification in the fifth strophe. This poem, inspired by the distance between users of English and users of ASL, demonstrates the separation of two entities and the gradual, sometimes choppy, sometimes confusing process of conflation. It starts out with a strophe that can be read either across the page or as units themselves. If the distance is shortened the first line might read, "If only I can see you move, I can hear you [...]." However, this reading would only contextualize one voice. The split, hopefully, allows the reader to conceive the "I" as two speakers: The Sound and The Movement as it would be if an English speaker and ASL speaker were attempting to communicate. Following the progression of the poem [2] brings the "bodies" together by essentially exploding the language and redirecting

it, so that “You, me” as a relationship becomes a point of detonation for meaning. [3] plays on the idea of the “Two of us” occupying a bizarre, still undefined relationship. The “Water area” as also undefined is the place of growth wherein the work of the mind can conceptualize the phenomenon of conflation. [4] Here, the “see” as in movement and the “voice” as in sound, work under the condition that an understanding of “mix” and “open” provides the possibility of “growing” “far”(distance) “less.” Finally, in [5] they conflate as a star winding together, heading “to-word” or a word for the significance of their relationship. It is a form that, hopefully, functions as the hybridization of two languages and two identities within a relationship, within the space of a poem.

The poems in this collection are attempts to creatively render the ideas offered here of translation. Translation allows poets to move in and through the conventions of language and form. It demands of poets a careful reckoning of self, language, and the actual as it pertains to the work at hand. It is an act that resists stasis or repetition, but anticipates high scrutiny of position and relationship. Translation is a challenging attempt to explode or magnify that which exists within complicated relationships, complicated further by the condition of language. The anticipation is that poetics may finally conflate positions, resulting in new perceptions of relationships that lead to new significations.

Translation is a purposeful exploration and pursuit of meaning. As workshop poetry continues to grow across the nation, translation is an approach to poetics that posits the value of discernment and experimentation. As such, it allows translators to view relationships as unique, real moments of nuanced meaning. If the saint’s body remains entombed, potential for new experiences to be discovered in relationships may be lost to fraud and corruption. At the very

minimum, translation is the act of safeguarding and venerating significant meaning against a system of stasis and separation.

When Bird and Fish Fall in Love

Articulation

I was asked to write the other side of the word. The word was “hand” and I flipped over the paper to draw a cypress tree, which was the back of my hand at the time. Later, I would draw “puuq” when asked to write the sign for cypress tree. And some time later, when asked to find the other side of the word “cypress-hand,” I offered a loaf of bread, explaining that it was the saint’s body buried in the bark.

Learning to Write

What is this terror? What is this ecstasy?

-Virginia Woolf

A neighbor looks
out the window,

leaning with both hands on the sill.

A purple blouse, draping
her right shoulder.
The other, bare.

Then, she closes
her blinds
like a great sleeping eye,

and a man drives
slowly with flowers,

possibly
without flowers.

Fashioning

I would like to give some space to these words, hanging
 heavy in banana trees among all the rattle-eyed confusion
off my translucent fingers.
How do I write?

The truth is I'm not trying anything to lighten them up.
 What can I say? They refuse to float upstream
and get on the goddamn page where I
can see them.

Like a polar bear wrestling a shadow,
 the words would rather write me out tooth by tooth.
And if they were to leave, I would measure their absence
with bottles of whiskey.

When Bird and Fish Fall in Love

Knowing what to do with his love, he lay his arm over his ribs.
Tiny greens slip delicately out his unblinking eyes and vanish in the violence of intimacy.

“You haven’t been listening,” he says.
One can see it plainly enough, and she
remains silent, muted by a childhood instinct. “Nothing is secret,”
he says under his breath.

And tomorrow will offer another opportunity
to reflect the world in reverse

or as it once was or could be in a dream. Tonight, he is content
to have the watery shadow, but she returns to bright, stretching visions of red hands
upheld under a sky-constitution of no words.

“What I mean is that you thought it was a secret,”
he says and falls silent, but she is already pretending
to be sleeping. He sinks. His eyes still open.

And neither knew whether it would
be a brave thing to turn the lights out or keep
them on.

Enantiodromia

For E.H. Gombrich

The bird, we read,

is a subtle part

of the poem, and must

go round and round,

and so end, promising

something else to lie

in the water, nearby.

Bird Out of the Machine

Yesterday, I opened my mouth,
and out hopped a finch or robin.
I don't know

her name. If you want, science
might catalogue for you her colored breast,
constrain the curve of her beak with a Latin ruler,

but I have no idea how she spins in the air
like a frightened minnow,
or sings as red and purple ribbon falling,

nor how she made a nest of my tongue.
In her absence, she left a tiny blue egg,
which I now keep on the mantle.

Translation

For Jacques Derrida

“A text is not _____¹ unless it hides from the first comer, from the _____², the law of its composition and the rules of its game. A text remains, moreover, forever imperceptible. Its _____³ and its _____⁴ are not, however, harbored in the inaccessibility of a secret; it is simply that they can never be _____⁵, in the *present*, into anything that could rigorously be called a perception. And hence, _____⁶ essentially, runs the _____⁷ of being definitively lost. Who will ever know of such disappearances? [

] ⁸ To a(n) _____⁹ degree, _____¹⁰ has already said all _____¹¹ *meant to say*. Our lexicon at any rate is not far from being exhausted. With the exception of this or that supplement, our questions will have nothing more to name but the _____¹² of the text, _____¹³ and _____¹⁴, mastery and play, the paradoxes of supplementary, and the graphic relations between _____¹⁵ and the _____¹⁶: within the textual, the textile, and the histological. We will keep within the _____¹⁷ of this *tissue*; between the metaphor of the _____¹⁸ and the question of the history of _____¹⁹.

¹ A winter's retreat

² Migratory instinct

³ Body part flashing

⁴ Spill of color

⁵ A verb meaning to pull together

⁶ Being alone in a field

⁷ Word for danger, but also peace

⁸ A new genealogical image

⁹ The thing between me and you

¹⁰ A bright piece of metal carried off

¹¹ A favorite hiding place

¹² Sanctuary or preserve

¹³ Feathers on the edge of body

¹⁴ The body on the edge of terror, as in necessity

¹⁵ Two points of reference used while traveling

¹⁶ Flight plan

¹⁷ Attempting something blindly

¹⁸ Aviary

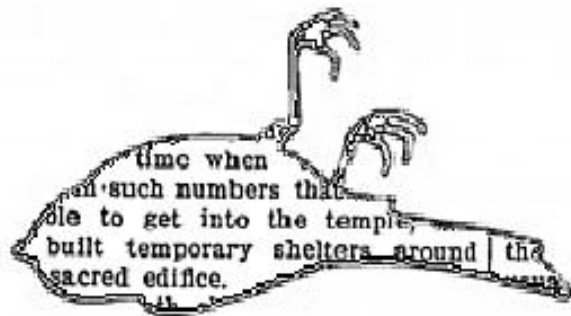
¹⁹ The sky

Use This Space to Draw a Bird

This is what I mean when I say “bird,”
but it’s not exactly what I mean. I mean
to give the bird shape of a context
with a “word,” so that I might convey
a sense of bird in some poignant way
about love or the fear of abandonment
or the temperance of foolishness.
In fact, it would be far better
to let this sparrow supplant the word,
and let the word become
the object of its affection.

Out of Your Mouth

This Bird Is a Bird



How She Made Herself

From German “Fuss”

She gathered
up the earth and made
two symmetrical mounds.
One she stuck in a doorway,
the other in a grave.

From Old Norse “leggr”

She gathered
up trunks of oaks and alders,
polishing them into smooth poles,
which she placed into the mounds,
keeping one leg broken always
for good luck.

Fem form “lumbeus” from Latin “lumb”

Then she cupped water
to make a river flow
forward and backward
and the river remained hidden
as a well spring
of strength, and endurance.

From Greek “thyrsos”

Having picked Orchids,
Hyacinths, and Myrtle, she formed
a great heaving chest of blossom
wherein she placed the red star
of the earth, ripened,
preserved in oil and salt, fragrant
and tender.

From Sanskrit “īrmá”

And on the great sides of the coffer,
she placed the living strands of animals,
bound in infinite ouroboros nature,
compassionate, never
tearing or swallowing.
And, with one arm of gravitas,
she drew in the unfamiliar at length.

From Old English “hnecca”

Out of ivory, she fashioned
a tower of song. In the hollow chambers,
she placed with delicacy the hum
of a great hive, dripping with honey.

From Gothic “haubith”

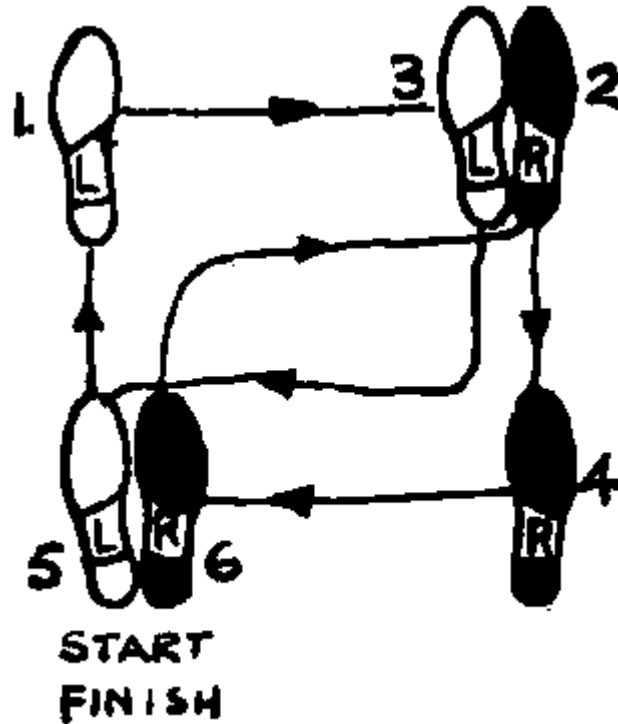
And from the horizon of a waxing
morning, she stole the pale, glass moon.
With sorrow she rested the orb
on the tower
where it may be a guide
in times of darkness.

From Old Frisian “blōd”

Reaching into the earth,
she gathered fire and magma
and drank her fill until the heat
burned through her body,
leaving a map of blushing curiosity
and steady calescence in code
for her offspring.

From Proto-Indo-European “wid-es-ya”

As a wreath, she fashioned
lightning as white as apple flesh
gathered from a storm,
and twisted it around her temples
as a crown of victory.



L. Purple-bourbon-cliché-laughing

R. Trot- pinwheel-honey-death

START

1. There's a fine line between sea and sky.
2. Watch a cardinal fall into glass.
3. Forget the mode of previous instruction.
4. Blue breath of resuscitation.
5. Rolling under the cloudy pass.
6. If one exists, then so must I.

FINISH

The Word Is as Melancholy
For Neruda

As she says, “window,” he looks at her clumsy mouth.
He believes it is inconclusive and turquoise.
His eyes curve
like an asteroid across the trajectory of her lips.

She will form him with her tongue and let him
go again and again. He will return each time
shapeless and vast.

This is a secret:

She is more delicious than the ache in haiku,
and he more painful than the desire in a field of lightning.

When he says, “window” it feels sometimes as though
a forest is cut down.

Through which window did they enter? In here,
a secret presses their mouths together,

like fruit, silently evolving over the round sphere of “never seen,”
not “already heard,” tracing the collapsed whiteness of a single, round flower.

Of course this is a secret. I mean,
who would I tell or who would believe me?

I wanted to see the trees!
-Child passing by

but was unaware of any danger...

Vague trees at first,

As I wrote “magnolia,”
my neighbor’s magnolia

[the one with
wide, white
blossoms]

elms,
oaks,
spruces,
dogwoods,
birches,
willows

when I wrote their [names] in typeset.

a letter dejected, scratching the sky.

23



Symballein

She above the earth.
Each undressing.
He wading out to sea.

So, the ocean appeared likewise
to space. His eyes were two words
of the moon, one real, one mirror.

And her lips of stone part blue
pathways, leading like smoke
across celestial fields.

And in impasse, the beginning
of mortality, the beginning of heaven,
and the end of both, language

lifts out from their mouths,
twisting into the long, sad
branches of a willow.



Signs

Waist deep in water,
arms out.
Stretched to heaven
the body, a great poem
of cypress.

A single, fallow feather
bobbing on a dark, green
mirror.

The voice singing
in the cypress tree
sounds like a marble
in a glass jar.

The words “appear” in amber,
chartreuse, or cardinal
strokes and later “disappear,”
falling from the branches.

The ever widening circle around the trunk
I know to be a golden shiner, swimming in spheres of
unrelenting redemption.

Semantic Nature:
If I should stumble
upon the Word,
while out walking
along a rough beach
or forest pathway
some late afternoon,
I will uproot it.

Every death I must die in
the snow-pale flesh of a
naked cypress tree. The
only moving thing in the
branches is the eye of my
prayer. The darkness of
black jade at its roots is the
darkness in me, and the
mutable constellation of my
birth, the only sound in the
water.

13 Leaves

1. Albatross {red apple} Zebrafish
2. Bluebird {abrasive piano} Yellowfin Tuna
3. Canary {explosion} Xiphophorus xiphidium
4. Dove {sinking} White Cloud Mountain Minnow
5. Egyptian Goose {copper moon} Viejita Apisto
6. Flamingo {Hebrew alphabet} Upside-down Catfish
7. Grackle {silence} Ten Spotted Livebearer
8. Hawfinch {three of hearts} Sailfin Molly
9. Iceland gull {my father} Red Tailed Shark
10. Jackdaw {winter coat} Queen Loach
11. Kingfisher {apostrophe} Peacock Mouthbrooder
12. Lesser yellow legs {Orion's Belt} Ornate Pim
13. Magpie {oil paint} Nijsseni's Dwarf Cichlid

Missing Poem

This poem is missing.
Here, there should be
several lines of a poem, each
dropping
like seedlings
into the bath water.

These lines
might fill
a cloudy night
with stars like
knives in silverware
drawers,
some tarnished,
some barely seen.

Each stanza like a lost
fox in the attic,
scratching up the carpet
as I lay in bed staring at the ceiling

This poem,
however, is
elsewhere arching its back
in fear or anticipation,
perhaps having the advantage,

like a jaguar in the hall closet,
waiting with full patience
until I come home.

Last night, he took the long way home.

Last— Occurring at the end or near the end of a procession of nights, as in time, order, or place. Definitive. Individual; single. Utmost; extreme. Of the sacraments of penance, viaticum, or extreme unction administered to a person dying or in danger of dying. To continue albeit expended or exhausted; enough. To continue to survive.

night—a period of darkness, wherein he found a condition or time of obscurity, sinfulness, misfortune, or madness, etc.

he- A male person or animal. An indefinite antecedent such as *one*, *whoever*, or *anybody*. A person or animal of unknown or unspecified sex. The fifth letter of the Hebrew alphabet. The chemical symbol for helium.

took—held or possessed. Grasped, gripped, and controlled. Captured, perhaps by killing. Received into his body or system by swallowing or inhaling. Endured or submitted with equanimity, without an appreciable weakening of his resistance. Removed from one place. Carried to another. Came upon with captivation or charm. Proceeded to occupy. Availed himself of and entered upon (a way, course, other person). Recorded his actions. Determined by inquiry, examination, measurement, consideration. Understood. Cheated, swindled, robbed, and victimized. Fell or became. Led someone or something somewhere somehow.

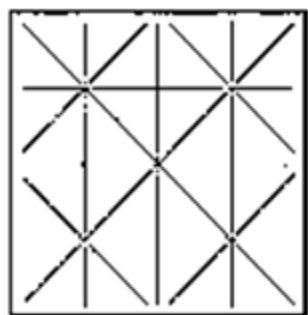
the— Indicating himself as distinct from others. A qualifier. Indicating parts of his body, the most important parts. Expressing relationship to. Indicating enough of something. To note an individual he loves, or a number of individuals he loves. To specify or limit a modifying effect on a part of his body or personal belongings.

long— having considerable linear extent in space or duration in time. Extending beyond his normal or moderate limits. Experienced as passing slowly because of difficulty, tedium, or unpleasantness. Reaching well into his past. Looking far into his future. Intense, thorough, or critical; seriously appraising. Being against great odds. To have an earnest or strong desire or craving, a yearning to be suitable.

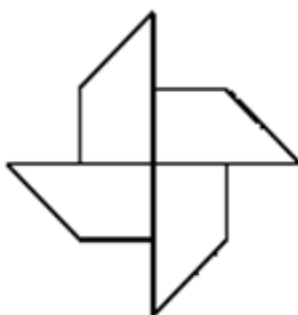
way— A manner, mode, method, or means for attaining his goal. Passage or progress on a course. Distance. Space for passing or advancing. A habit or custom of his. A mode of procedure that he chooses or wills. Living. His virtue or his vice. Condition or the like.

home— a house, apartment, or other shelter that is his usual residence. An institution for the homeless or the sick. The dwelling place or retreat of an unknown animal. The place of origin where he is native or most common. Refuge. Birthplace. Rebirth place. Deep; to his heart.

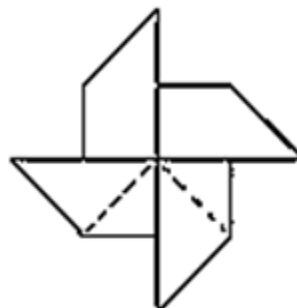
How to Make Fish



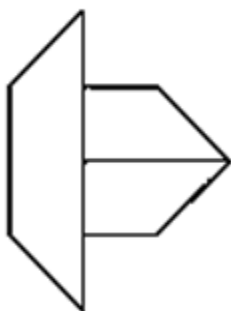
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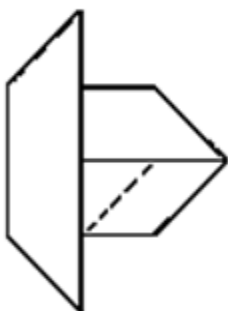
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3



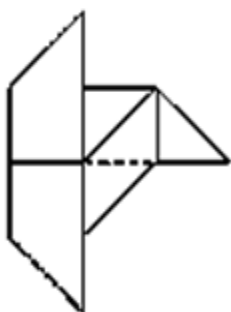
3a



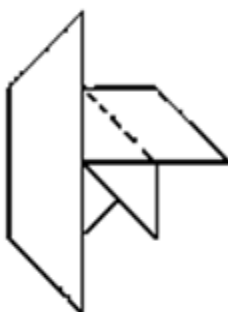
4



4a



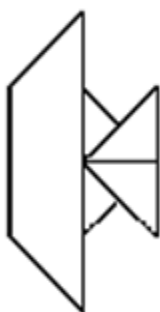
5



6



6a



6b



7



8



1. Take a square
sheet of paper and pre-
crease it with the lines
of desire as shown
by tracing the Pisces
constellation.
2. Collapse
this poem
as a drowning
star or a silver
windmill
of your thoughts.
3. Arrange the fins as letters:
folding the bottom-left
fin down and fold
the bottom-right fin into
the right word.
- 3a. Have no destination, but instinct,
like a feather falling or a sunrise
trying not to forfeit
its enigmatic nature.
4. Flatten your mind,
like a knife, a rippling edge
moving back and forth.
- 4a. Prepare the tale:
fold the bottom-right
fin upwards as a flying crow
memory.
5. Then, fold the tongue down.
6. Repeat with upper
half of the story: fold
the top-right fin
downward as a fallen
human once was an angel.

- 6a. Construct “water” around “fish” in order to keep it floating.
- 6b. Without sound, slip around
the folded edge of hysteria.
Every new birth is panic
until buoyancy is achieved.
Try holding your breath.
7. Then, fold the tongue back up again. Thus completes the hidden
history of fish.
8. Now, in preparation of meaning:
fold the top of connotation and the bottom of denotation into semantic paddles,
pointing towards the center of the universe, then pointing back toward self, leave
a small mouth for metaphor.
9. Turn over. “Fish” is tangible.

Riddle

Morning

I wake in the soft ethics
of dawn, listening
for the sound of water:

I am a shapely creature,
splayed
between two alphabets

rewritten through
the tenderness,
and treachery of distance.

Midday

Day light tells me when I am ready.
To have a name, I am told,
is everyone's responsibility.

My body in the world dictates
the dichotomy of motion, and I
wonder which direction I'm headed

or which door to enter, which one to exit.
I haven't consulted the manual, and
I don't understand how to fit into "name."

Night

Like silence
hanging dumb
and naked, am I
to be broken?

The Sound and the Movement

[1]

The Sound

If only I can see you move,
speaking
of

shaking and splitting.

and the Movement

I can hear you
as if you were formed
consciousness

[2]

Body in Motion

Look! an arrow / jumping sound
Throat fork / on fire
Mind explosion / redirection
You, me / detonation.

[3]

At Rest

Way look, sound many, same-time

Stuck

————— t ———

Water area

grow

Mind IMAGE

look around at

————— t ———

Two of us

growing

[4]

Without Gravity

If see you
voice understand
mix open
hear

grow
far
less

[5]

To-word

Two constellations winding together.

Either the Fish or the Idea

As if from a Dream

-voices on the opposite side of water-

Floating with a slanted potential
as a plum flower without eyes
but not the kind I'm looking for.
I must rethink "undo" as a thing to "do."

Or from a Doorway

like blood
pushing
water,

pounding through
the wool
ocean of

"Trying-to-get-to-
the-root
or
Out-from-
behind-the-echo."

The Darkening Clouds

Forgetting the
half opened window,
Rain pools on the floor.

I Notice First

the line of my silent name
cut straight across your bangs.

I must remember
that all sound is "push" and "pull."

One Will Never Sleep

A red sky at dusk is a closed palm:
La mot n'est pas toujours la vie.
La vie n'est pas la mot <toujours>.

Mais quelque fois...

I drift down the abyss with a stranger,
flashing in hand-pressed eyes
like a green apple hanging above my head,

i.e. the slow burn of hard liquor,
i.e. the dropping of coins,
i.e. waiting for an invitation,
i.e. diligent at the stenograph.

The world leans with the work
of our mouths, sloppy, bending and twisting
like a clock caught in water.

The wine wanes
until only dizziness and bravery remain
beautiful by chance on a dissecting table.

La vie est un étranger. There,
I said it.
I said, "*la mot juste est la vie étrange,*"

and I said working is like thirsting
for inveterate dreams of silver, then yellow,
all light emanating from a fist of vision.

This Never Happened; I Never Asked These Questions,
But I Did Plant a Tree

Will I always carry the timber of my hand
across the spiny back of the Ozarks
 or the dusty trails of French parks?
Am I finally the one that fades in the leaf-song,
the aching song that escapes to the un-rimmed sea?
Was I not
thinking of bathing the shallow feet
of god? I ask
 if the sweet cold of winter is finally illumined
 by crowns of green.

 I always begged her
to reveal her wings to me at night, of him the
weight of his breath.

 Smiling, still, the ghosts I once loved...
 I watch a little longer

the last time ever scene:
How did I get into bed?
Is that you knocking at the door?
Where have you been?
What did you say?
Why did you use apple shades of the Appalachian
Mountains to paint the mornings?
Is my word for you merely the word
for me in reverse?
 Will you hang like a bluebird
always
overhead like a thought
of drowning?

Between Me and You, Laughter

I saw a fox
by the lake at my father's house.

Surprised to find
me standing
there, she bolted
from below the willow
like a roman
candle,

turned her
head and leapt
into the field: a flame
in yellow grass.

She paused
only
to see
if I would follow.

Instead,
I turned my head to the willow.
In the shadowy bend of branches,
I could see

two pair of small, round moons
staring back.

Hunger Brings You Close

I would this poem be the thin surface of water with you above in the darkening clouds, and I trapped in the deep below. Faintly at first, we sense each other. You wonder after my movement. I conceive my opposite. Then, hunger brings you close. You make out the delicate silver of my shape, gliding beneath you. I catch you in my eye and rise to my dying. Through violence and necessity the poem breaks, and we are one in this space, this poem between life and death.

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VITA

The author was born in Damascus, Ohio. He obtained a Bachelor's degree with a writing minor from Kent State University in 2006. He entered the Low Residency MFA program at the University of New Orleans in 2009. Currently, he teaches developmental studies with an emphasis on writing at Stark State College in Canton, Ohio.